

Water Facts: Number 7 Choosing home water treatment devices

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There are many home water treatment manufacturers, dealers and products in today's market. Choosing the best water treatment device for your home can be difficult. Reliability, product performance, dealer reputation, and cost of installation and upkeep are important for you to consider when choosing a home water treatment unit. Unfortunately, there are a few federal and state guidelines to regulate the sale and manufacture of water treatment devices.

There are, however, several national organizations that offer some guarantee of product performance and reliability. The Water Quality Association (WQA) is a national trade association made up of water treatment manufacturers and dealers. It encourages water treatment manufacturers to comply with certain industry standards.

Manufacturers voluntarily submit their products for testing. The WQA tests the units for durability, longevity, performance, and taste, color and odor of treated water. All units that pass the testing process receive a Gold Seal Product Validation. This seal certifies the product's mechanical performance, but not its ability to remove harmful contaminants.

Another group, the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF), does have testing standards that include the unit's ability to remove contaminants that affect health. Products that fulfill specific standards receive the NSF seal of certification. You can write the NSF for a list of the drinking water treatment units they certify. Their address is: NSF International, 3475 Plymouth Road, P.O. Box 130140, Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0140.

These organizations are good because they can help you select a reliable system. However, you need to be cautious of even these certifications, because some manufacturers will add unjustified claims after their products have been tested.

Look for dealers that have good reputations and do not use scare tactics to get you to buy. Some sales people may do a water test in your home that causes a sediment to form in the sample. They may then tell you that this is harmful to your health. This test shows that there are minerals in your water. Many dissolved minerals found in water are beneficial to your health. Also, keep in mind that all public water suppliers must meet strict state and federal health standards before they release water to your home. If you are in doubt about a sales person's claim, call the Better Business Bureau to see if there are any complaints against the company.

Some dealers will tell you that the EPA endorses their product. Do not be misled by such claims, even if an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

registration number appears on the product. The EPA neither tests nor endorses any water treatment product.

Certain carbon filters treated with silver to control the growth of bacteria do carry an EPA registration number. This number only shows that the unit will not release harmful amounts of silver into your water, not that it is certified for how well it destroys bacteria. These units should be installed only in homes that receive treated water that is already free from harmful microorganisms.

Ask your water treatment dealer about long-term maintenance costs, including an estimate of the amount of electricity the unit will use per month.

Also, ask if there are extra charges for installation. When purchasing a reverse osmosis unit, find out how much water goes down the drain for each gallon of treated water produced. If you are on a septic system, or if you pay for your water, this extra amount of water is important to consider.

When you choose a unit, check the recommended maintenance schedule. Failure to change filters on time can result in a release of contaminants into your water.

Make sure you are buying a unit that will take care of your particular water quality needs. Know why you want to treat your water. Learn which types of treatment units will best control your particular problem. Look for dealers that are reputable and don't make exaggerated claims about their product. Finally, remember to do routine maintenance on your device to ensure the purest water for you and your family.

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